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EPA designation helps pollution fight in Valley

By Emily Behrendt, Tribune

December 14, 2006

In the midst of a string of high pollution advisories, the Environmental Protection Agency added 22 Valley companies to its list of employers who offer incentives for alternate modes of transportation.

The 22 employers were named Best Workplaces for Commuters, a designation implemented by the EPA in 2000. They will join 102 other Valley companies that were named to the list since Valley Metro started the program locally three years ago.

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"We decided to get involved because we have so many employers here that automatically have a lot of the requirements that would qualify," Valley Metro spokeswoman Susan Tierney said. "As long as they were putting forth the effort, they might as well get the designation."

In order to be selected as a Best Workplaces for Commuters, the company must offer at least one major incentive such as transit passes or monthly van pool subsidies of at least \$30, or a telecommute program that reduces the amount of commuting trips by at least 6 percent each month.

It also must offer at least three supporting benefits like providing designated parking for car pools, offering incentives to use alternative modes of transportation or to move closer to the work site, or participating in an ozone awareness program.

McKesson Corp., a Scottsdale-based company with about 550 employees, offers subsidized bus passes, designated car pooling spots, van pooling, a compressed work week program and a bike to work program.

According to the company, its programs eliminated \$107,838 in gasoline costs and participating employees saved \$476 this year.

Melbourne Williams, director of quality and process improvement for McKesson, said the benefits of these practices are two-fold.

"We're not only providing this benefit to the employees to help reduce their cost of coming in to work, but it also allows our company to practice good stewardship of the environment," he said.

Tierney said the program helps employers be a good neighbor.

"The community sees that employer as being positive and being concerned about the environment," she said.

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IKEA in Tempe also was given the designation. Some of the incentives they offer is a chance to win a \$25 gift card if an employee car pools or bikes to work on a high pollution advisory day, and a commuter club card, which has discounts to retailers and fast food locations. Tempe also installed a bus stop right in front of the store to make the commute more convenient.

"We really want our coworkers to embrace these programs," said Jackie Terry, a spokeswoman for IKEA, "We want them to arrive safe, on time, and ready to work."

Terry also said the company tries packing its trucks as full as possible to limit its number of trips when transporting its products to and from stores.

Which is why it is convenient, Terry said, that so many of its products are packaged in thin, flat boxes.

Tierney said Valley Metro's Web site, www.valleymetro.org, lists suggestions that would help cut down on drive time and expenses, such as asking to work from home or refueling after dark.

"There are so many little things you can do to contribute to overall air quality," she said, "and each little effort really does add up."

Contact Emily Behrendt by [email](#), or phone () -



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